

THE RT. REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF QUEBEC,
President.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND YOUNG MEN'S

Mutual Improvement Association

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SELF-EDUCATION, A LECTURE

READ TO

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND YOUNG MEN'S MUTUAL
IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION. *

ON WEDNESDAY, 28th DECEMBER, 1864,

BY

THE LORD BISHOP OF QUEBEC.

SELF-EDUCATION.

Young men,—We live in times when the apparatus of education is a theme of much discourse, when schemes for the advancement of education, are put forward by thinkers and are worked out by workers—when mills and manufactories are in full operation for the production of model masters—when inspectors and examiners are running to and fro upon the earth, and there is a general conspiracy against the ancient and honourable order of Dunces. Yes, young gentlemen, this is a fact which may not be relished, but which cannot be ignored, that we live in an age of examination—that a literary examination is becoming the door to all appointments. We, in this country are not as yet under the influence of the system so much as they are at home; but we feel the movement; and we shall I doubt not, ultimately be carried along with it. Some day we shall find ourselves, in respect of this latest development of our civilization, almost upon a level with the Chinese, with whom this system has been for many years thoroughly carried out, and indeed, for all that I know, has been carried out a little too thoroughly.

Now the kind of education which will enable a man to win in this race, is emphatically the regular education. Scho-

* A small portion of this lecture has been taken from a printed speech but, as the speech was the lecturer's own, he hopes to escape the charge of plagiarism.

lastic training will always outshine even genius in an examination. Well, but I address those whose chance of scholastic training is gone. What they are likely to get of it, they have had. But they must not sit down therefore in despair. Culture they must have. And I purpose to show this evening, that the very best culture they may have; for after all there is no education, which for its best and highest results, is equal to self education. I say its best and highest results. I here waive of course the question of examinations for appointments, and speak of that mental culture which does not merely supply literary adroitness, and argumentative skill, but which enables a man to reason rather than to argue—enables and prompts him to feel nobly, to think bravely, and to act manfully. These I call the best and highest results of education. And this is a part of his education, which, whatever may be his advantages, each man gets for himself. A system of intellectual and moral pumps will never fill the passive recipient with such results as these. Exhaustive notes and rare editions, various readings and all the *minutiae* of criticism—these are the tools of the critic; and critical scholarship I am far from undervaluing; but do not let those who cannot get this, fancy that they can get nothing; or that what they can get is of little value. The dynamic value of education (though there is a good deal in the form, for thought cannot be divided from the form of thought) lies much more in the quality of the matter of our studies, and the intenseness of the intellectual heat we contrive to evolve in the process of our studies, than in the getting up of their adjuncts. If a master mind has poured out high thoughts upon his page, or dissected with his pen the compound substance of life, and laid open to view the springs or motives of conduct, I may, with great advantage, go through what is called the getting up of his work. To learn off a compendium of the treatise—to acquaint myself with what others have thought about it—to ransack libraries, to compare authorities, and to exhaust commentaries, in order to acquire an exact and accurate knowledge of every chronological, historical, geographical detail connected with the work in question—this is, undoubtedly, a process producing

accurate habits of thought, highly to be desired. But the greatest benefit of all that I can derive—for self development—the unfolding of my power, the awakening of feeling and the quickness of thought within me, will be from the text itself—will be from bringing my mind into contact with the mind of genius, rather than with the frigidities of critics, commentators and compilers. And bringing our minds in contact with genius, keeping close to it—its very self—and not to its husk—the greatness of thought, the generosity of sentiment, the fineness of feeling, which are attributes of genius, will, under the combined influence of the open and receptive admiration with which a modest man listens to a great man, and of the penetrative power with which it is the prerogative of genius to speak—will sink into, and spread their leaven through our minds. And this, this is the very pith and marrow of Education—the first step in, as it is the last result of, mental culture. The enlarging of our minds—not the cramming of our memories, but the expansion of our faculties—the enlarging of our sympathies, the elevating and strengthening of our thoughts and our power of thinking, the purifying of our feelings, the widening, and deepening of our capacity to feel, the investing our moral sensitiveness with its right discriminating touch, so that, feeling quickly and feeling deeply, we feel moreover as we ought to feel—this is the grand result of Education.

And for the production of this, there is nothing like pondering and poring upon the bare text of a great writer, till we have assimilated his thought and made it a part of our intellectual system, and so bringing our mind close to his. And, though studying in this fashion we may make mistakes which notes and explanations, teachers and professors might have enabled us to avoid—and though we may miss much, yet (unless we are making criticism our profession, unless professional knowledge is our object, which alters the case) yet the incompleteness of our critical knowledge is amply compensated by the improved tone, the magnetically communicated power of our minds, consequent upon the manner in which we have acquired what we do know.

Let me illustrate my assertion by an instance. I once heard a clever scholar from Cambridge who wrote Greek verse with facility, laughing immoderately over some grammatical errors in Lord Brougham's translation of one of the speeches of Demosthenes. And, critically speaking, I have no doubt he was right. Upon such a point he could hardly be mistaken. And yet he was grievously in error, when he fancied that he had read Demosthenes to more purpose than the translator, whose translation he so complacently demolished. Admitting that he cannot, or did not always translate him with rigid accuracy, yet I maintain that no man, now living, has read Demosthenes to more advantage than Lord Brougham. Certainly his eloquence is different from that of his master. The result of his intense, though perhaps uncritical, study of that great orator was not to reproduce Demosthenes, but—what is a great deal more—to produce—himself. It has never been my privilege to hear Lord Brougham. We are occasionally reminded that he is still amongst us by seeing in the newspapers the mellowed productions of his green old age; but these can give us no conception of what he was in his prime. Some of his earlier speeches we have, many of us, read. And truly his eloquence is of a kind to make evil doers tremble. Scorn, withering scorn, drops corrosive from his lips. His contempt is a thing to be avoided; and his indignation scorches like fire. They however who heard Harry Brougham in the first burst—the full flush of his genius, tell us that (as with all true orators) the written page is but the cold corpse of his eloquence: that with the eye, and the voice, and the living, speaking, gesticulating man, its soul is fled. Lord Brougham read Demosthenes; and genius kindled from the touch of genius, as fire from fire; my friend studied the great orator to light the taper of grammar, but the effect was not so good. I saw him, on one occasion, stand up to address a popular audience, and he was, ladies and gentlemen, with all his learning, he was, emphatically, a stick.

Let me give one other instance in which the principle for

which I am contending has been by some almost elevated into an article of the faith; viz: the meliorating effort upon the mind of man, of earnest, honest, thoughtful study of the plain text of the Bible without note or comment. I know that that Book is not like any other book, that it is the word of God, and that His Holy Spirit, whose office it is to guide men into all knowledge, interprets to the pious reader. But in the mode and manner of attaining to a fruitful knowledge of scripture the same principle holds which obtains in other branches of learning. And that exaltation of the spiritually educative value of the Bible without note or comment, is (though it is sometimes attended with an undue disparagement of other means) not the cry of a narrow and illiberal fanaticism but the plain conclusion of common sense, warranted by reason, and extorted by experience. As in secular learning, so here, to despise, or to disparage, the labours of the critical scholar would be absurd. These labours are indispensable, we must know what the text is, and ascertain its meaning. We must know what the Bible is, and what it says; and we must put this into our own tongue. There must be men who can and will do this. Nor may we disregard systematic theology, the history of the faith, criticism, grammar, creed, history,—they are all useful,—they are all needful,—but for the ripening of the mind in sacred lore there is nothing like familiarity with the text itself, even in a translation. And that is just the case with every other lore.

And here, as I am addressing my juniors, I shall not perhaps be thought egotistical, if I speak briefly of my own experience. Young men, I was brought up at a good school, and I took my degree in the University of Oxford; but I honestly think that, in all that is valuable in my small stock of acquirement or faculty, I am a self educated man. And of my studies,—my secular studies,—I verily believe, that the most influential—the most beneficial to my intellect—were those carried on by myself out of two small volumes, for one of which I gave sixpence, and for the other of which I believe

I was so extravagant as to expend ninepence. One was an odd volume of the writings of Dean Swift. The other contained the essays of Lord Bacon. It is many years since I had either of these volumes in my hand, but, at one time, they were hardly ever out of my hands. I carried them in my pocket, and at all times, under hedges, and in lone lanes, I read, and re-read them ; till my mind was saturated with their contents. And hardly a day passes in which I do not feel their power.

Thus much of the feasibility of self education, and of its quality. It is not however to be denied that the solitary student labors under some disadvantages, disadvantages which it is the object of such associations as ours in some degree to remove. The solitary student has not the stimulus which carries him along who forms one of the many congregated at a great intellectual centre. To use a metaphor of modern date, it is a harder thing for him to "get up the steam." The dryness of intellectual effort is not felt when we daily meet, and converse with those who have a keen interest in our own pursuits. It is pleasant to follow out and easy to remember our studies, when these form the subjects for earnest thinking and the topics for eager talk with our daily acquaintance. A very high place amongst educational influences must ever be occupied by attrition of thought and collision of mind. There are excitements of intellectual activity, and corrective of its vagaries, which we must procure for ourselves as best we may. And even without them we need not despair, where there is a will there will always be found a way. They are stimulants and correctives, but the solid work must still be done within us. If our thought is to be of any value, we must acquire and beget a self sustained and independent capacity for elaborating thought within the recesses of our own minds. And after all, too much reliance may be placed upon external aids and excitements. "Conversation" ; says one,* (who was himself a conspicuous example of informa-

* Gibbon.

tion and of genius) "conversation may inform the mind, but solitude is the nurse of genius."

You will observe that my remarks have been chiefly directed to literary education. And with good reason. Language is the great instrument of thought. And besides no one in these days, can pass for a highly educated man, who has not a wide and a solid acquaintance with literature. It is through literature only that you can bring your mind into contact with the world's great masters and teachers. Language is not only the instrument of thought, it is the record of mind. It must not be supposed however that I mean to say that literature is the only means of education. The world is a mighty educator. The responsibilities of life, the demands of our social relations, the requirements of official position, the conduct of affairs—these call out, train, and develope, the faculties and powers, that are within us; and he is not uneducated though he should be an ungrammatical man, who, as he rises in life, rises to the occasion, and discharges with efficiency the duties and obligations to which the Providence of God, and his own exertions, have called him. This then is one great mode of mental cultivation—moral and intellectual—the doing of our duty thoroughly and well in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call us. Upon this head, though, it forms no part of my purpose to enlarge. I have only mentioned it, to show that I have not overlooked it. And I shall now revert to that branch of self-education which is derivable from books.

From what I have already said, you will perceive that, in my judgment, to educate yourself is feasible. Determine to do it, and (I had almost said) the thing is done. Determine to do it—here lies the whole secret. Such an education as will develope your powers, and put you in possession of thoughts upon which your mind can live and thrive, does not need an expensive apparatus of books; but it does need thorough determination, inflexible resolve, and unflinching toil. "Look you now, without labour nothing prospers," was the maxim of the most perfect of the Greek poets; and a maxim that will never die. There is no royal road to learning—or to

anything else that is worth having. There is no royal road to learning ; but there is a broad high-way open to all, and that will bring all who are willing to endure the heat and the dust, and to plod bravely on, though foot sore and weary, to their journey's end.

You all know the story of Benjamin Franklin and the manner of his education. There is much in the man that I cannot commend ; but his energetic pursuit of mental culture is worthy of all imitation. The story is a little thread-bare perhaps, but it is none the worse for that. Things become trite, only because they are true. I will point your attention however to an example of self-education more fresh, and more entirely of to-day.

Let me ask you to take in hand, and carefully read, from beginning to end, the not very thick octavo volume, which, under the significant title "My schools and schoolmasters," contains the history of the education of the late Hugh Miller, written by himself. There you will see portrayed the steps by which the poor Highland lad, often over worked and under-fed, drew from his barren opportunities the nutriment which sustained and developed his magnificent intellect. Successively, if I remember aright, a working man in the stone quarries—one of a gang living together, in a lone shanty—a clerk in a bank—and the editor of a newspaper—he was, he became, he made himself an adept in science, and a great master in the literary art. You will find in his writings, especially in the last great idea—the last grand conjecture—which he projected upon the field of speculation—you will find qualities and excellencies of style which you may look for elsewhere in vain. In all his writings, but more particularly in his "Testimony of the Rocks," we are compelled to acknowledge the presence of power. There is nothing spasmodic, but the intense heat of his imagination, controlled but not extinguished by his massive common sense, ever smouldering beneath the page, flashes through from time to time with an electric light, that reveals clusters of ideas, contingencies, and possibilities which it was never before given us to see,

and leaves an impression upon the mind, not to be effaced, that by such revelation its stature has been raised.

But you may say, "This is an exceptional case. I do not pretend to have the genius of Hugh Miller, and therefore it does not follow, that what he did I can do, under similar circumstances." Perhaps not (but let me observe in passing that strength of will and capacity for work are the best parts of genius.) You may not attain to the scientific and literary eminence of Hugh Miller; but this I can promise you, that if you will go through the same course that he went—with the same steadfastness—the same thoroughness—you will come out of it with right and title to call yourself an educated man. Further examples I shall not adduce. The case I have cited is at once a proof of the fact that self-education is possible, and an illustration of the manner in which it may be accomplished. That this is a desirable consummation, I need not maintain. The worth of education is fully recognised. It is not however so much for its practical commercial value, (though that is by no means to be overlooked) that I urge self-culture upon you. I urge it for its own sake. It is its own exceeding great reward. It makes you more of a man.

There is a saying of Lord Bacon's, in one of his Essays, to the effect that studies serve for use, for ornament, and for delight. Now, that ignorance is ungraceful—that a cultivated mind is an ornament to the person—few, I suppose, will be inclined to deny. I need not stop to argue that point. Equally unnecessary would it be for me to dwell, at any length, upon the pleasures attendant upon mental culture. Since, however, the allurements of pleasure exercise an influence so powerful, so constant, and at times so far from beneficial; I would gladly linger for a few moments, upon those which are pre-eminently the pleasures of a man. "Man" we are told, "is a being of large discourse, looking before and after"—a being, that is, who remembers, imagines and reasons. The pleasures of the imagination I can very well leave to the care of the poets,

'The blood of Douglas can protect itself.'

But what an unfailing source of satisfaction does that man carry about within him, in whose memory lie stored the great facts of nature and of history; and whose mind has acquired the habit of reasoning upon those facts! What an unfailing resource against weariness and vacuity has he, whose knowledge, and whose mental activity enable him, looking around, to apprehend the order of nature and to inspect the mechanism of the universe! What an unfailing resource against weariness and vacuity has he, whose knowledge and whose mental activity enable him, looking back, to reanimate the past! Beneath whose eye, as he unrolls the records of time, the spirits of our fathers start from every page in their habit as they lived, to re-enact for his gratification and instruction the story of the world! Young man, though your means may not command social distinction—though the accidents of fortune may have placed you in an uncongenial sphere—you never can be at a loss for good society, if you have made yourself a fit companion for yourself, if you have grown familiar with the wise, the great and the good, of other days—if you have learned to hold “midnight converse with the mighty dead—” if you have made yourself master of the spell that can “create a soul under the ribs of death,” and call up Shakspeare, or Milton, or Addison, for your entertainment and delight.

But enough of this : education has, as I intimated just now, though I do not care much to insist upon it, a practical and commercial value. The first thing we have to do—be our calling or profession what it may—the first thing we have to do is to put ourselves in possession of the experience of preceding generations. This is the law of civilization. This is the condition of progress. This is no less the condition of individual success—we must bring ourselves abreast of the intelligence of the day. And you will find, young men, that a finished education is a profitable investment. Are you touched by that last infirmity of noble minds? Would you set your mark upon your generation? Do you covet power? Then cultivate your mind. Would you bear yourself manfully in

the conflict of opinion? Make yourself master of your weapon. Before ever you are called upon to stand upon your defence, for the maintenance of your convictions, or your credit, make yourself master of your weapon. Use will give it edge. Science will give it strength and temper. Literature will give it polish and point. Only do your part thoroughly, strenuously, now; and, take my word for it, the weapon when wanted will not be wanting; when called upon to hold your own in the struggle of life, you will find that your previous training has given you power—that the discipline to which you have subjected the forces of your mind has rendered them prompt to your necessities, and amenable to control—you will find what an invaluable ally in the conduct of business, what an incomparable instrument for the elucidation of affairs—is a mind master of itself—a mind tried and trained, and therefore not to be cajoled by cunning nor daunted by effrontery; but able to think through an emergency; and ready to speak out its convictions with no faltering lip nor stammering tongue.

But there is a caution to be observed. Books (and this is another saying of that same Lord Bacon who was so eminent both as a man of learning and as a man of business) books cannot teach the use of books. That is a lesson to be learned in the school of the world. You must bring modesty as well as industry to your studies. Book learning, bear in mind, when unmodified by a just observation of life, obtrudes upon business, is ever pedantic and futile. But do not forget, on the other hand, that mere personal experience, unaided by research, must—with all its adroitness—must, of necessity, be incomplete, and empirical. The two should never be dissevered. It is their union—their interpenetration—their fusion—that makes the capable man. Welded into one they produce a ripeness of judgment, a fertility of resource, and a ready tact, which will command the confidence of men.

These, young men, are some of the advantages of education, and you may attain them. You may educate yourself, but you must be in earnest. Nothing comes of trifling. Earnestness is one of the foremost of qualities. It is noble and beautiful in it-

self and it gives power to the other virtues. Without it there can be no greatness in character, no permanent success in life ; a fickle, frivolous, sauntering disposition being contemptible in itself, and generally bringing a man to sorrow. Unstable as water thou shalt not excel, is written on the forehead of such an one. In the struggle of life, the idle and the incapable must of necessity be swept away, to sink lower and lower in the depth of insignificance and helplessness, if not of degradation. Take, then, the wise king's advice, and, whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. Keep in mind that old saw "without labour nothing prospers." And (you are a christian) recollect this too, without Christ nothing prospers. "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Let this principle be the guiding light of all your conduct. This, this alone, it is, that turns the primeval curse into a blessing—upholds the dignity, and develops the meliorating influences of labour. Without this you will find the work that you set yourself fruitless, or producing bitter fruit,—you will find the world's work that lies before you a dreary, toilsome task, which must be done whether the spirit flag in failure, or revel in the fever of unsubstantial success. But penetrate your mind with the spirit of those divine words, and you will find that it hallows every occupation, ennobles every calling, that it eliminates failure ; for, whatever be the result, in the very effort there is success. God's good hand will be upon you, and you will go on from strength to strength, and prosper. Or, should misfortune come, you will be prepared for that too. In the tranquil trust of a good conscience before God, you will stand, amid your broken projects and fruitless efforts, disappointed but not disheartened. Give but the apostle's golden rule a fair trial. It will supply tone and elasticity to the mind, which no disaster can daunt, nor long drawn ill-success wear away. You will be educated in your spirit, as well as in your intellect. And anything better than this, I can neither wish for you, nor recommend to you.

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